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Emerging From the Academic Pipeline: Senior Women Faculty Members

Florence A. Hamrick

Editor's Note: This article is an extension of Professor Hamrick's examination of senior women faculty in academic. Professor Hamrick introduced this work in Volume 1 Issue 2 of the *Journal of Women in Educational Leadership*.

Abstract

Twenty-six women with professor rank at a large, public, research extensive university were interviewed for this study in which respondents discussed the meanings and significance associated with full professorship. Major themes included: the promotion event and the accompanying title of professor, anticipated and actual changes in their status and working conditions, and their identities, goals, and contributions as professors. Conclusions address issues such as dilemmas of senior professorship, effective participation in institutional governance, and progress of women through the faculty ranks.

Women's promotion and career advancement has been the subject of extensive study and remains a central focus in feminist research and writing as well. Benjamin (1986) described a three-pronged approach to women's progress as illustrated by various tasks undertaken by those doing feminist work: "to redeem what has been devalued in women's domain, to conquer the territory that has been reserved to men, and to resolve and transcend the opposition between these spheres by reformulating the relationship between them" (p. 78). Each of these tasks has direct relevance to research on women faculty in terms of, respectively, pursuing scholarship of and about women, increasing the demographic representation of women in faculty and administrative ranks, and challenging the sociocultural assumptions and structures that allow gender discrimination to continue. The goal of this study was to ascertain the significance of professor rank and status as understood by women professors at the rather elite academic setting of a large, public, (*Camegie-classified*) Research I university. In accordance with this goal, the study was theoretically framed using women's standpoint epistemology (Harding 1986, 1991) both in order to avoid reliance on men's experiences as standards or norms (Harding, 1993), and to explore the potentially silent or silenced aspects of the lives (McLaughlin & Tierney, 1993) of women who have reached professor rank. Learning more about the experiences of women who achieved success in careers and work settings typically dominated by men will shed light on problematic elements of organizational and cultural structures within which individuals' career advancement and success continue to be measured.

Demographic trend studies document some improvement yet persistent clustering of women in less prestigious disciplines (Moore & Sagaria, 1991) and in lower ranks as assistant professors, instructors, and adjuncts at research universities (e.g., Simeone, 1987). Proportions of women professors at research universities continue to be much lower than at smaller and less prestigious institutions (Moore & Sagaria, 1991). Indeed, Valian's (1998) research identified a trade-off between rank and institutional prestige for women faculty, with higher rank most often

being achieved at less prestigious universities. Additionally, studies have documented persistent chilly climates for women professors in terms of collegial relations and barriers to promotion (e.g., Hall & Sandler, 1983; Sandler, 1986), and explored how traditional academic norms and cultures serve to exclude or devalue women and their scholarly contributions (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988; Grumet, 1988; Pagano, 1990).

In terms of demographics as well as institutional climate and support, extant literature on women faculty reveals lingering uncertainties about their full membership in academe. This study clarifies aspects of the senior professor role and meanings associated with professorial rank and status from the point of view of women who, by virtue of their senior rank, have successfully emerged from the proverbial academic pipeline. The results of this study inform aspiring women professors as well as faculty members and administrators who are involved in promotion and tenure related processes within academe.

Design and Methods

Site and Respondent Selection

The site selected was a large, public land-grant university in the midwestern United States. The institution is classified as a Carnegie Research I university. The total student enrollment at the time of the study was slightly fewer than 25,000 students (almost 5,000 enrolled in graduate or professional programs). Total female student enrollment was 43%, and total minority enrollment was just under 7%. At the time fieldwork began, the institution employed 685 professors¹ among its 1,395 full-time faculty members. Women constituted 22% of full-time faculty members at all ranks and 10% (70 individuals) of professors.

At the beginning of fall semester, all 70 women professors were invited in writing and by phone to participate in an interview-based study of their characteristics, experiences, and perceptions. Twenty-six consented to be interviewed.

Data Collection and Analysis

Interviews with each respondent, conducted during the academic year, ranged between 50 minutes to more than four hours. Interviews were semi-structured and involved questions in four primary areas: promotion and tenure experiences, institutional citizenship and belonging, intersections between professional and personal lives, and stress. Through the use of prompts and silences, opportunities for interviewee-guided talk were provided to encourage respondents to recall and describe their own experiences, thoughts, and conclusions (Reinharz, 1992) about their academic careers. The analysis reported in this manuscript focused primarily but not exclusively on responses to the topic, "What does it mean to you that you are a full professor?"² as well as related probe questions. All interviews were transcribed to facilitate systematic analysis. The constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used to identify common themes and concepts (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) across respondents and interviews.

To maximize trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), probe questions and response summaries were utilized during interviews, and all respondents received copies of their interview transcripts with a request to check for accuracy and detail. Additionally, two meetings were held in which preliminary findings were presented, and respondents provided feedback and reactions. For respondents interested yet unable to attend one of the meetings, written drafts of major

findings were prepared and mailed to them. Two-thirds of the respondent group participated in one of these forms of post-interview member checking.

Table 1

Disciplinary Distributions Among Respondent Group and Population

	Population (N = 70)	Respondents (N = 26)
Arts and Humanities (AH)	26% (18)	19% (5)
Biological and Agricultural Sciences (BAS)	17% (12)	19% (5)
Physical and Mathematical Sciences & Engineering (PMSE)	(6%) (4)	4% (1)
Social Sciences and Education (SSE)	51% (36)	58% (15)

The respondent group was reasonably representative by disciplinary category of the group of women professors on the campus. Arts and Humanities (AH) were somewhat underrepresented in the respondent group, and Social Sciences and Education (SSE) were somewhat over-represented.

Institutional tenure and promotion data on women professors and the respondent group provide only limited information about these faculty members since many were tenured and/or promoted to professor prior to joining this institution. Some comparative indicators, however, can be ascertained by examining dates of Ph.D. completion or completion of another terminal degree. According to institutional data, women professors at the university received their terminal degrees between 1950 and 1988, resulting in a range of 38 years. The mean completion date was 1975, the mode was 1981, and the median was 1975. Among the respondent group of women professors, the range was 36 (1950-1986) with a mean of 1974 and both median and mode of 1975. Although a similar range was apparent in both groups, more respondents received their degrees at earlier dates than generally did the group of women professors at the institution.

The following themes and discussion cannot fully characterize all women professors' experiences or perceptions. The respondents did not speak with one voice about the meanings of senior professor rank nor did they share all of the same perspectives. As one indication of the wide variety of responses regarding professorship, consider the following descriptions two respondents gave of their promotion to professor. One SSE respondent commented: "I felt very good to be a full professor, and that was a goal. I've always been this incredibly ambitious person, so my goal was always to be a nationally recognized scholar." Another SSE respondent, however, insisted:

I think it's important . . . to say that I never thought about it happening to me. It was never a goal. Things just happened. I did not have this plan in place that I was going to go to a university, get a Ph.D., teach, and go through the ranks of promotion. I just did with passion whatever was presented to me to do, . . . and then the next path opened, so it wasn't this planned route.

In the following analysis and discussion, therefore, I attempt to chart Frye's (1990) "prevailing winds" in the data while also acknowledging the broad variety of perspectives and experiences among the respondent group.

Results

Respondents most often contextualized their responses in terms of the meaning of the titled promotion itself, and they also discussed the anticipated and actual changes in their work lives subsequent to the promotion. The first two themes presented below characterize respondents' discussions of achieving senior professor rank and title. The subsequent set of themes characterize their workloads, the nature of their work, and their working conditions as professors.

"No Difference"

When asked the question, "What does it mean that you're a (full) professor?," several respondents initially replied that it meant nothing or had no significance for them. For some, this response was given with a short laugh, for others, no sign of amusement accompanied the response. For example, one BAS professor commented:

Obviously one enjoys having arrived with that professional category, simply because this tells you that you have done a good job of what you do and that your colleagues respect your knowledge and performance. Beyond that, I don't know. It hasn't had that much significance.

An AH professor remarked:

Basically at [the university] or in my department, it has no meaning whatsoever. It's just a title. I have no privileges or benefits or no salary that comes from it. . . . As far as I can tell on campus, people from our department have no more status by being full professors.

Some respondents went on to state the general everyday inattention to rank, including their own. According to one BAS respondent, "Quite candidly, I don't know very much about people's rank, unless I see it in writing." A SSE respondent with significant work experience outside of higher education added:

I don't know that [professor rank] has any meaning to me. . . . I don't go around saying, "Oh, yes, I'm a full professor." I guess I see it as just the title I hold, which is, again, probably different than those people who have been in academia continuously and have gone through these stages and steps in a different way.

Among most respondents, the promotion was associated with no significant changes in their self-perceptions. They did, however, become aware of others' increased or different expectations of them. According to one BAS professor:

I think [becoming a professor] is a little bit like a birthday, in that I don't feel any different after having attained full professorship than I did before, but what I became more and more aware of is people's expectations of me, or their perceptions of me have changed, and I

realize more and more that I'm called on for advice and counsel, or leadership positions, and that type of thing.

A SSE respondent also emphasized the messages she received from others that conveyed different—and heightened—expectations:

I'm pretty much the same person, I think, with new titles. That's a good way to put it. I will probably always be that. . . . I do find that there is a degree of respect that comes with it, and I don't know that people treat me differently. They certainly are asking me to do a lot of things [now].

Some respondents concluded that the more personally significant achievement was their tenure and promotion to associate professor, although the promotion to professor served as an honor and acknowledgement of their work. A SSE respondent recalled:

When I was promoted to associate, I remember the predominant feeling I had was relief. The anxiety with being non-tenured was over, and it was somewhat-what's the word when you anticipate something so much and then it was sort of a letdown? [Interviewer: "Anticlimactic?"] Yes, anticlimactic. When I went up for full [professor], I didn't give it a lot of thought. I just said, "Well, this is one of those hurdles I have to do," and when I got it, I actually experienced more enjoyment out of it, I think, than when I got tenure.

In at least two cases, however, the promotion to professor was described in some detail and characterized as a hard-fought and draining battle, since colleagues and others had initially not perceived the quality of their work to be meritorious. In these cases as in most other cases, no significant changes in workload or self-perception had accompanied the promotion to professor. However, the promotion and title had for them become associated with frustration and disillusionment. As one AE professor described:

[Professorship] doesn't seem to be any status at all. I thought it would be, but I don't see that anything has changed. I mean, it was something that I struggled for for years and wanted it as if it were, you know, the moon, and I got to it, and it's nothing. It has not changed my life at all. My teaching is no different. I haven't gotten to teach the things that I mostly wanted to teach. I've been continuing to do the research that I was doing before, and it really has not changed my life at all. I don't feel any recognition that has been different or better because of it, and so it's mostly sort of an anticlimax, not what I expected.

Other respondents agreed that their promotion to professor was more anticlimactic than they had anticipated, but the above respondent also raises the important issue of mismatches or disjunctures between perceived and actual roles and status of professors, which many other respondents also discussed. Their coming to terms with the title and roles is related to the second theme associated with the meaning of professorship.

Idealization of Senior Faculty

As students or younger faculty members themselves, many respondents explained that they had held senior faculty members in extremely high regard because of their perceptions of senior faculty members' age and considerable wisdom. One BAS professor said, "The evolution has been finally deciding, 'Yeah, I am old enough to be [a professor].'" Additionally, one SSE respondent recalled:

When I was an undergraduate, I just thought full professors were really something, that they were like Nobel prize winners[At my undergraduate] commencement ceremonies, we'd have these individual department ceremonies, and then the bells would chime on central campus. And then everyone would walk down the hill in their robes and stuff, and I would see all these people, you know, these famous people walking, and I would think, "Oh, my God." I guess as I've kind of gone through this system, that my attitudes about that have changed. I guess I just see [professors] as people that have met criteria and have probably taken risks to do it, but I don't have this academic halo around them anymore.

This same respondent later added:

[The professors here are] pretty much like me. They're hard-working. They have a certain level of expertise, but they're not this idealized thing that I had in my head that they were. So maybe, maybe I've made it like [that] so I can work with myself I don't think it's that big a deal to be a full professor.

An SSE respondent was acutely aware of the conflicting pride yet also unexpectedness she associated with having achieved professor rank:

I'm deeply honored [to have become a professor]. I still find myself like the little kid pinching myself saying, "How did this happen?" I just followed this path, and I have a great deal of pride, but also an element of surprise, which I think also speaks to the image that women carry: "Whoa, how did this happen to me?" rather than, "Of course I should be here. Of course I was on this track, and I've been successful, so of course it should happen." No, it's more surprise.

As their careers progressed, many respondents reconciled their prior idealized images of professors with the reality that they themselves were professors. This reconciliation involved a decrease in awe, an understanding of the work and processes involved in attaining senior rank, and an increased humanization of professors. The more realistic images of professors-some of which are still unfolding-enable many respondents to view their own rank as legitimate and earned.

This is not to say that many respondents do not also express disappointment with the diminished regard and respect they perceive to be accorded professors. Among the respondents who discussed this, the diminished regard was thought to apply to professors regardless of gender. As one AH respondent said:

The next generation [of faculty] is in power now. They've just sort of like put the senior members aside, you know. . . . I have actually tried to say that this is a generational problem across the university, because when I've been on faculty appeals committee and studied other cases, it's really hard for the younger generation to give the more senior administration any recognition. They just don't want to do it. . . . All across campus they have this perception that senior professors have tons of benefits and don't do anything for it. . . . When I actually look at the files of the senior professors whom people think are not doing anything, they're doing a lot, but there is that misperception of senior professors all across campus. . . . People still say, "Oh my gosh, they're getting by with something and they're theoretical dead wood," which I feel is really unfortunate because people should respect each others' contributions.

The following themes of relief, affirmation, latitude and expectations, and assuming an institutional place all are related to respondents' characterizations of their work lives as professors.

Relief

Not surprisingly, most respondents expressed great relief about not having to go through the promotion and tenure process again. One SSE professor said: "It's just with a sense of relief that I don't have to [fill out the promotion and tenure forms] any more, and that it went through the first year and I [won't] have to go through this ever again." For most respondents, this relief was principally associated with the knowledge that time previously devoted to assembling sets of materials designed to demonstrate the quality of one's work could now be replaced with time for focusing on the work itself.

The end to promotion and tenure review (which may not in fact be the end, as some respondents also made reference to institutional draft proposals on post-tenure review), however, did not mean that respondents believed they were ratcheting down their efforts or wanted to do so. Instead, respondents spoke about the high standards they had consistently set for their own work and the continuation of these self-imposed standards and expectations. Two SSE respondents commented, in turn:

[Professorship] signifies you've accomplished something. For me it's never meant that I've arrived, though, because I always feel like there are other things to strive for. There are always other things to do. I have a lot of unmet goals still, and most of those lie in the research area.

I think I'm more productive because I don't have the stress of having to [go through the process of promotion]. You do it because you want to rather than that "I have to do this, I have to spend time doing this" when you're too tired to do it. Now I can choose to do it because I want to do it, and I find it much more productive, because it just-that whole thing is gone, you know, having to achieve that.

The fact that respondents no longer had to demonstrate formally the worth of their achievements to the institution did not mean that they now wanted to or did conduct their work in the absence of standards. Their guiding standards and expectations for quality, which respondents had maintained for a long time, were internally imposed. Indeed, some respondents

insisted that their self-expectations had increased since their promotion to professor. For example, an A-H respondent remarked:

Because I think the kind of person that I am, the more, the higher up, I guess I moved, the more responsibilities I felt I needed to take on, and the more I needed to put out to be true to the promotion, or to be true to the title, whatever you wanted to call it. So I felt, well, more was expected of me, and I wanted to produce more. I wanted to produce higher quality work. I wanted to produce better and better than I had before So the promotions are not necessarily promotions to me as much as opening the gates to more challenges.

A BAS respondent added:

Sometimes when people hit middle age, I think they tend to kind of rest on their laurels a bit and say, “Well, you know, I’ve done that, and I’ve achieved this,” and, you know, “What else can I do but sit here and enjoy?” And I think that’s wrong. I think that particularly older people have such great insight . . . and I think absolutely people over 50 should be looked upon as very important cogs in, you know, the evolution of the next level.

As these passages indicate, many respondents view their faculty work as an unfolding of expectations and continued work. In this way, respondents emphasized “growing into” the professor role and meeting challenges posed by this new career stage. These passages may also indicate respondents’ views of professorship as a challenge that demands more and more rather than rank as a reward for their prior work. However, affirmation was also associated with professor rank and respondents’ work lives as professors, as addressed in the discussion below.

Affirmation

The promotion to professor served for many respondents as recognition and acknowledgement of their expertise. However, the promotion did not represent a *conferral* of expert status, since the respondents considered themselves disciplinary experts already. As one sciences respondent concluded: “I don’t think at any time in my career I’ve said I wanted to be ‘such and such [title].’ I’ve said, ‘I wanted to study [my discipline], and I’m interested in science, and what do I do to do it? So it’s more being the means to the end rather than then end to, let’s say, being a full professor.” A BAS respondent also described her rank as secondary to the importance of the work she does:

Achieving professor rank was a fairly easy road for me, but by the same token, you know, I respect and appreciate why that happened and try to live up to what I did to get there and not just say, “Well, I’m there,” but whether or not I stay [at professor rank] or not it not important, because [the goal] is to stay at a high level [in the quality of my work].

While professor rank represented an affirmation and acknowledgement of respondents’ content expertise, it also signified a critical local affirmation for some respondents by symbolizing their arrival as legitimate “players” within their departments and the institution. This was more clearly the case among respondents from natural science-based disciplines in which the representation of women on the faculties was much smaller. Although they had not considered their presence to be

illegitimate prior to their promotion, the senior rank served to indicate to others that they were now people with whom to contend. In the words of one BAS professor who also holds an administrative appointment, "I'm sure there are people who would like to get rid of me. As soon as you make any impact anywhere, obviously that's going to happen." A PMSE respondent described her particular departmental experiences using sports and gaming metaphors:

[Interviewer: "How do you think others perceive you?"] More of a threat. I was thinking about this the other day. A friend called me last night. She's staying with a mutual friend [and interviewing for a job] because her tenure case, they're really killing her. And we decided that the men are playing chess, and we're playing checkers. And I think it's the men are playing three-dimensional chess, like in Star Trek, and we women are playing checkers because we don't even know what the rules are. And the more I'm in academia, the more I realize it's a game. . . . I don't think women are perceived or minorities are perceived as true players until you become a full professor. It's like I said to my husband last night, what's the name of a first year player—football, basketball, baseball? It's a rookie. When you're an assistant professor, you're a rookie, and how do they treat rookies on the field? Well, once in awhile, a rookie might hit a home ran in baseball or he might make a touchdown, but generally they don't let you plan until you've proven yourself. And it seems to me like full professors, when you get to be a full professor, then they start seeing you as a real player, and therefore more of a threat, so they're going to hit you harder. . . . The full professors are certainly going to be able to think, "Well assistant professors, we can get rid of them if we don't like them, but how do we get rid of somebody if we don't like them and they're a full professor?"

Within departments that were characterized as particularly competitive (often but not always male-dominated departments), senior rank signified that the professor had been victorious in this particular competition and had earned respect, however grudgingly accorded.

Some respondents also spoke of affirmation that involved their increasing roles as consultants and source of respected advice both internally and externally to the institution. A BAS professor concluded that she is respected in her department "in that people seek advice from me." Another BAS professor remarked:

My work has a lot of applicability to a particular area of [practice], and I get the research directors from companies that are involved, and they're calling me a lot, you know, to come in and work with the company, to give them advice and counsel, to explore collaborative research projects, and that type of thing.

For others, however, this advisor or consultant role was something that had not come with the promotion, and this was a disappointment. In the words of one AH professor:

I, of course, fantasized that my opinions would matter more in university-wide kinds of endeavors, but since I've been promoted, I have not been asked to serve on any university-wide committees, nor have I had any opportunity to do anything in the way of administrative work or anything that takes advantage of the fact that I have this—quote—exalted rank, so that's been rather disappointing. . . . I thought I would be consulted more, you know, that people who were looking for support would seek me out as a woman full

professor, and that hasn't happened, either. I have only been a full professor for [a short period of time], . . . and maybe I just wanted too much to happen too fast.

Latitude and Expectations

For many respondents, the professor rank meant greater freedom with respect to setting their own work agendas and selecting projects for attention, yet at the same time less uncommitted time in which to pursue these projects. This was often the greatest surprise—and in many cases, a common letdown—among respondents. The professor rank enabled many respondents to pursue long-term projects or research less dependent on immediately publishable outcomes. A SSE respondent shared: “There are some undertakings that one can imagine taking a long time to get anything out of I would have probably been unsure about whether I should get involved in something like that [as a junior faculty member].” An AH professor explained:

In terms of doing my scholarship, it's slowed down, in part because I've been doing all this other stuff [committee and service work], in part, I suppose, because some of that energy has gone into my family, but I also can feel that I can kind of wait until something is finished in a way I didn't before. [Before,] I felt more rushed in terms of getting it done because of the [tenure] clock, you know, not because the paper was really completed or the ideas had really jelled.

Respondents noted that a number of committee assignments and appointments can be held only by faculty members with professor rank. Concurrently, many respondents found themselves with increased and, depending on the appraisal, disproportionate service responsibilities. Not all respondents considered an increased service load to be necessarily a burden, since their opinions were also informed by their relative interests and commitments and how consistent their interests were with the work of various committees. According to one SSE professor, the service load depends in part on departmental availability of senior faculty members:

I think there are maybe nine full professors in the department, and we're heavy at the associate level, so there are a lot of added responsibilities now because there's not as many people to go around when they want a professor to do things. . . . I had been making more judicious choices up to that point [of promotion to professor] about what I would get involved in, trying to set some limits because I get asked to do a lot. . . . I'm doing heavy service, really.

A BAS professor regarded her service load as professor to be qualitatively different rather than additive:

[Committee work] is something that I've always enjoyed doing, and so I suppose I do more, I guess, but it was even probably as soon as I got promoted to associate professor, I was on a lot of committees. So I don't know that I've been on more, but maybe they've been more important ones now. I'm chair of the College curriculum committee, so it's in more roles of responsibility.

Additionally, however, respondents said that their status as professors and women meant they are called upon when broader representation on committees is desired, which was regarded as a signal of progressiveness by one SSE professor:

I find that sometimes I'm called to serve on different committees than I would have in the beginning of my career here—things that come out of central administration where they want full professors. . . . we as [women] full professors get appointed to some of those kinds of committees more than would have happened in earlier years.

This same respondent also attributed her current service on one key University committee to her guess that the university president wanted a balance of men and women on the committee.

Mentoring of students (particularly graduate students) is something respondents have regularly undertaken. According to one PMSE professor: "I have done a lot of mentoring with other women as I've gone through my professional life, in all the settings where I've been." However, respondents almost uniformly reported that an increased focus on mentoring is among their expectations for themselves as professors. A SSE professor stated, "[Professorship] means for me to mentor."

With senior rank in their respective disciplines and fields, respondents saw themselves as more involved and committed to encouragement of new talent, mostly graduate students and new faculty members. An AH respondent remarked:

I feel very responsible to the younger faculty. I've gotten more involved in research, but not put my name on it, necessarily, more from a mentoring standpoint. I feel very responsible to give them as many opportunities as I can for them to be successful. I feel that I have to be somewhat of an example.

A SSE professor said:

I feel responsible to be a role model for women in the department who are coming up and for other women who are in the department who are in other positions. I am the only person in this department who is a tenured faculty member, which means that my position may be a little different from departments where there are other women who are in similar kinds of positions.

Another SSE respondent specified a broad scope for her mentoring and modeling role since her field is one with low numbers of women professionals:

I feel as a senior woman faculty member and one of not very many in my field, my job is to mentor women across the world, and so I do a lot of that. I try to be very supportive and bring people along and help them, and I try to do that on campus. Now, one of the interesting things about here is I did not come up through the ranks here. I am not well connected on campus because I try to be well connected off campus, and not just in the state, so it makes me a less effective campus mentor than I might be, in my opinion, but I think I know the field, and I think I can be very helpful to people in those extra-university positions.

In a few cases, however, some faculty who expressed an increased commitment to mentoring were disappointed that new opportunities to work with graduate students had not resulted from their promotion. They had previously associated this increased mentoring with professor rank. According to this AH respondent:

I thought [full professorship] would mean a lot more than it has, unfortunately. I thought it would mean a great deal more in terms of working with graduate students. Last year I had a student whose thesis I directed, and it was great fun. . . . I thought I'd be doing a lot more of that. I haven't had a chance to teach graduate courses since I was promoted.

Assuming Leadership

For many respondents, senior rank has meant that they are able to assume broader responsibilities on behalf of their departments and the institution. Approximately one-third of the respondents held full- or part-time administrative appointments at the time of the interviews, but the notion of senior professors as leaders was not limited to formal administrative duties. The broadly defined leadership responsibilities also included generative and supportive roles as well as skeptical and critical roles—all of which were intended to improve their departments and the institution. One SSE professor concluded: “I think probably that a full professor needs to take on the challenges of trying new things and leading the way.”

For some respondents, the kind of leadership they described mirrored the role senior faculty members had played in their departments while they were working toward tenure. A SSE respondent said:

I have really appreciated the fact that both departments [I've worked within were] very supportive of their young people, and in order to do that, the senior people had to take on extra work. They had to do some of the committee work that could have been dumped on the junior people. They had to do some of the teaching that could have been [assigned to junior faculty]—and I was very cognizant of that at the time, that I was a beneficiary of that—and I think I feel some responsibility to try to help in that regard.

An AH professor described her department of assistant professors along with “two full professors and two associate professors, and so I guess I feel very responsible for pulling my share of the load and making certain that we do get some research going.”

Additionally, however, many respondents associated their leadership role with working toward improvement of institutional shortcomings they perceive. One SSE professor characterized her reluctant “watchdog” responsibilities:

I also think it's a job to kind of—maybe this is not good—to be a watchdog. That's a terrible phrase. Kind of when you feel that there's something that needs tending business. I think that's a responsibility, to help others see that, including the chair.

Another SSE professor, however, was not hesitant to critique instances of unfairness in shared governance processes and her growing concerns:

I tend to be very open and honest and like things out on the table. And I'm maybe a bit naïve about the operating of the university, but I find a lot of times there are secrets. There is stuff operating, and so we don't have the full knowledge in making decision, and that upsets me greatly. Then I feel blindsided by something where there was really something else going on, and we were working intently on this, but this [other factor] was driving it and we didn't know it. That concerns me.

An AH respondent described her frustration with what she saw as a too-compliant faculty, unwilling to assume the aforementioned watchdog role:

It gets tiring to be with people who always seem to be thinking the way the administration thinks and who don't see themselves in any kind of adversarial position with the administration, who are thinking, "How can we make it work out with the administration? How can we work with them to do what they want?" And my position mostly is, "How can we work against them to do what we want?" And I very rarely see administration as a source of, you know, positive faculty-centered or woman-centered roles, and so it always amazes me how many of my colleagues are just so glad to work right along with them to do whatever it is that they want to do. You know, "They must have a reason for whatever it is, and therefore we'll just be good kids and go right along with that and make this work out." And so anybody who stands up and says, "Hey, maybe this isn't such a good idea" is a troublemaker, you know, and we're better not to engage that person in the process. It's going to slow things down.

Among respondents for whom a greater leadership role accompanied professor rank, some struggle with how they can promote the work of the institution while also critiquing aspects of institutional functioning or decision-making with which they disagree or find fault. Some, like the above respondent, maintain that their voices are not heard or that their opinions are systematically dismissed. Others articulated their experiences related to leadership by decoupling senior rank with ascribed status. They explained their perceptions that status is associated not necessarily with achieved rank but more so with career history. One BAS professor said:

I can't completely separate what had to do with attaining [professor] rank and what goes with the fact that I've just stayed with this for such a long time period. I think those things are sort of married together. I can't really separate them completely.

Another BAS professor who has been a faculty member at the university for many years reached a similar conclusion about her status on campus:

As far as I'm concerned, I think the longevity of the time I've been here probably is more impressive than anything else. . . . I get referenced for various things that I think I would not now if I hadn't had these particular levels of experience in administration [as former department chair and through committee work]. I don't think I'm extremely significant in administrative circles, but every once in awhile my opinion is asked about things, which indicates it at least has some level of significance as far as higher administration is concerned. I don't know how you balance all that out. I'm not a maker and a shaker, but I think at this point in time I probably am someone whose advice might be listened to. . . .

Things accumulate—it makes one more obvious. It's just one of those things that happens as you go along, and enough people know that you exist and know what you might be able to contribute.

A SSE professor added, however, that she was not always readily regarded as a source for historical or useful perspectives on issues:

I do sometimes think that I *know some things that I wish other people wanted to know*. You know, you get to the point where you've experienced enough and done enough things that you would just like to say to some people, "Have you considered this?" [verbal emphasis from interview]

These perspectives on rank, status, and institutional history were primarily voiced by respondents who were long-time faculty members at the institutional site. These respondents also emphasized that the foundations for professorship and the broader institutional leadership role it can signify were laid early on as a result of committee work and getting to know people across campus through the years. They did not believe that the promotion to professor somehow opened a different set of doors or conferred a higher institutional status.

Conclusions

The picture that emerged of these professors is largely one of persistence, achievement orientation, and longevity. The promotion to professor was for most a satisfying, culminating affirmation of their expertise and contributions. In many ways, the professor role was different for them primarily in terms of magnitude and emphasis. For example, respondents reported an increased commitment to mentoring and scholarship, but these were continuations of respondents' prior commitments and not new undertakings for them. The professor role was qualitatively different in that it represented greater degrees of freedom and judgment to try new things, decide where to focus energies, and launch long-term projects or studies with larger scope. They reported less pressure with respect to their scholarly endeavors yet at the same time, due mostly to increased service responsibilities, less unstructured time with which to pursue these endeavors. This was a noteworthy disappointment among respondents.

Additionally, for some respondents, the affirmation of professor rank also brought increased attention from colleagues in that they now represented a more permanent presence with which colleagues must now contend. Service loads were more onerous for respondents who served on multiple committees. This situation was exacerbated by increased administrative commitments to ensure gender diversity on committees while the numbers of women professors eligible to serve remained proportionately small. Respondents also spoke of their accumulation of new responsibilities as a professor, yet mentioned few roles or responsibilities that had been shed after earning promotion to professor. Additionally, respondents seldom spoke of new or additional resources to offset the heavier workload. However, most did discuss the lowered job stress that the promotion to professor had entailed.

When respondents spoke of the status that accompanied their rank, they found status to be wrapped up in, and enhanced by, longevity on the campus and their prior service work throughout their years as junior faculty members. This service work represented opportunities to meet people across campus and become a known quantity in terms of expertise and participation.

Their status as faculty members who are consulted or called upon formally to participate in governance or administration was linked to their prior history of service.

These insights into women professors' institutional status may also have broader implications for shared institutional governance. Two currently popular practices at many research institutions, sheltering assistant professors from service work and hiring faculty "stars" into senior ranks, are justified by rationales such as, for the former, permitting maximum attention to research and increasing the likelihood of a successful tenure bid. However, these practices may also contribute in the long run to less effective faculty participation, and perhaps less faculty interest, in participation in shared governance. In both cases, the ability to establish an early track record of service and to become known across campus through one's service involvements, noted by respondents of this study as helping them be more effective with subsequent and more significant committee or governance roles, would be less likely occurrences.

If effective participation in faculty governance, and the likelihood that one will participate in more responsible institutional governance capacities, is related to early and consistent participation, then faculty personnel practices that emphasize research above all other faculty functions place less value on grooming junior faculty members to become faculty leaders of the institution. In the case of sheltering assistant professors from service commitments, women faculty (and perhaps all faculty) may face more difficulties with participating in institutional decision-making processes, exerting institutional leadership, and guiding the collective attention of their institution. In the case of hiring faculty "stars" into senior ranks, these faculty members again would be more readily identified as researchers, with fewer expectations or encouragement that they assume institutional leadership roles in addition to the disciplinary and scholarly leadership that is expected. If, as the respondents in this study indicate, institutional longevity is critical to being viewed as a potential leader and influential voice, these senior faculty may also be viewed as unprepared or unsuited for institutional leadership because of their lack of familiarity with the institution, even if they had done similar "time in the trenches" at other campuses.

Finally, the kinds of work the respondents reported engaging in appeared to be illustrative of two of the three "prongs" from Benjamin's (1986) model of pursuing social progress for women. The faculty members in this study assuredly had made progress in entering the traditionally male territory of senior faculty rank, and some had questioned and critiqued questionable practices that appeared to be oppressive. Less discussion was apparent regarding pursuing a broad scholarship of and on women, but this could have also been due to the interview questions that focused disproportionately on the processes involved in their progression through the faculty ranks and current conditions for their work. At times during the interviews, however, some respondents discussed their own scholarship and expertise in, among other things, multiculturalism and evolving family roles.

One way to consider Benjamin's three-pronged approach is to emphasize the complementarities, since together they represent a multi-layered approach for achieving sustained and comprehensive social progress with respect to gender. From this perspective, the varied aspects of these women's work are evident. For example, many respondents do their work having adopted largely traditional lenses for their scholarship and their identities as faculty members while other respondents have embarked on critiques of social structures and processes. Based on this study, more successful critiques may well come from the women faculty members who have been on campus the longest and developed more relationships across campus over

time. In a sense, these faculty members view themselves as members of the same academic community that, as senior members, they are committed to developing and improving.

Endnotes

- ¹ “Professor” is used throughout the manuscript to indicate the senior professorial rank. When discussing faculty members at other ranks, appropriate modifiers (e.g., “assistant” professor) will be used.
- ² The adjective “full” was often used in the interview protocol to emphasize the research interest in respondents’ senior faculty status as opposed to the generic descriptor “professor” as synonymous for all faculty members.
- ³ Confidentiality guarantees included not revealing college, department, or program affiliation of respondents. Therefore, broadly aggregated disciplinary categories are used instead.

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